

ARE BACKPACKS CREATING A HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERN FOR OUR CHILDREN?

As textbooks get heavier, portable computers become more prevalent, schools eliminate lockers, and kids carry more personal items, the weight rests, literally, on their shoulders. It is generally accepted that the weight of a backpack should not exceed 15% of body weight. However, recent studies and surveys of school children that most carry backpacks that well exceed the 15% body weight rule and one-third suffered from back pain. The shoulder area where the backpack straps rest is rich in nerves and blood vessels that serve much of the rest of the body-arms and hands, neck, back, and head. Carrying excessive weight in a backpack can lead to a number of health problems for your child.

Alarm Signals

- Aching in the shoulders, neck, or back
- **Pain or tingling in the arms, wrists and hands, especially at night**
- Muscle weakness
- Red marks and creases on the shoulder
- Struggling to get the backpack on and off
- Noticeable imbalances in the child's posture, including tilting the head and neck to one side and an uneven walk

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA), American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), and the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) recommend the following weight limits:

Person's Weight (lbs)	Backpack Weight (lbs)
60	5
60-75	10
100	15
125	18
150	20
200 +	25*

*No one should carry more than 25 lb.

TIPS FOR WEARING BACKPACKS

•Make sure the backpack fits:

- –**straps:** should rest comfortable on shoulders and under arms
- –**rests:** on the contour of the lower back
- –**sits:** evenly in the middle of the back, not hanging down the buttocks

•Buy a quality backpack with wide padded shoulder straps, and waist belt.

•Wear both straps and waist belt:

- –the waist belt distributes the load through the pelvis and hips.

• –If child insists on only using one strap, switch shoulders often. •Keep the weight in the backpack close to the body. Arrange the heaviest items closest to the back.

•Adjust the straps so the backpack sits on the hips and pelvic area, not at the top of the back or at the buttocks.

•Use a backpack with wheels or a luggage cart.

•Ask the school to issue a second set of books that can stay at home.

•Look for styles with compartments, which help distribute the weight